

LINCOLN LORE

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THE SHIPLEY SISTERS

There seems to have been a consistent and apparently well-founded tradition that one of Abraham Lincoln's grandmothers was a Shipley. Possibly this tradition would have been taken more seriously if it had not been claimed by some historians that both his grandmother Lincoln and grandmother Hanks were members of this family. One biographer concluded that the Shipley genealogy "so far as it relates to Lincoln, is false and the original inventors of it must have known that it was false." He also characterized the whole Shipley story as "ready-to-wear genealogy."

With the Shipleys out of the way this same biographer proceeded to prove, to his own satisfaction at least, that the grandmother of Abraham Lincoln on his maternal side was Miss Lucy Hanks, a daughter of Joseph Hanks, and that her illegitimate child Nancy, mother of Lincoln, was born near Keyser, West Virginia. A tablet commemorating this event was dedicated on May 6, 1933.

The Shipleys are not so easily removed from the picture as might be implied by the erection of the bronze tablet. Recent investigations have done much towards identifying the five daughters of Robert Shipley. It does not appear that there was a Mary Shipley who married Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the president, as has often been alleged; but that one of the Shipley sisters married a Hanks, presumably James Hanks, is now well established.

There has always been a consistent and apparently well-founded rumor that Lincoln's mother lived in North Carolina before arriving in Kentucky. Although much of the evidence which has been built up around this tradition is untenable, it now appears as if Nancy Hanks as a girl did live in the Catawba River Country as a small child, and then came with her widowed mother and her mother's relatives to Kentucky about the year 1790.

The Shipley sisters were not fictitious characters, but were daughters of Robert Shipley who first lived in Virginia and then migrated to North Carolina. While it must be admitted that some claims have been made with reference to Shipley history that cannot be substantiated, the following independent testimonials, gathered from different parts of the country and submitted by descendants of these Shipley sisters, seem to verify the fact that Lincoln's maternal grandmother was Lucy Shipley Hanks who as Widow Hanks married Henry Sparrow.

Richard Berry—Rachel Shipley

"Richard Berry, Sr., married a Shipley (Rachel) who was the sister of Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother. They took little Nancy to live with them when she was left an orphan but she

later went to live in the home of Richard Berry, Jr., whose wife was "Polly" Ewing Berry. In their home Nancy helped with the care of the children and the general family duties and was like a sister to their daughter, Elizabeth Ewing Berry. . . . Elizabeth was 12 years of age when Nancy was married to Thomas Lincoln and she remembers well the occasion of the wedding. It was her father, Richard Berry II, who with Thomas Lincoln signed the marriage bond."

A granddaughter of Elizabeth Ewing Berry who now lives in California.

"Captain Robert M. Berry was born in Montgomery County, Kentucky, on April 13, 1818. Two years later his parents, Richard and Polly Ewing Berry, moved west. His father was a man of considerable wealth and while a resident of Kentucky reared Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln, and at her wedding signed the marriage bond of her husband."

Clipping in a Missouri newspaper on death of Robert M. Berry in 1913.

Robert Mitchell—Naomi Shipley

"My mother was a Mitchell, a first cousin of President Lincoln's mother; their mothers were Shipleys from North Carolina. My mother was captured when a girl in 1790 by the Indians twenty-five miles beyond Crab Orchard at a place called Defeated Camp. Grandmother (Naomi Shipley Mitchell) was struck down but grandfather stood by with a spear and carried her into Crab Orchard Fort. She died next day. . . . My mother was surrendered under Wayne's Treaty. She went to live with her cousin, Richard Berry, who was also married to a Shipley (Rachel Shipley) who had moved from North Carolina to Washington County some time before our immediate family started out."

A granddaughter of Naomi Shipley Mitchell who lived in Indianapolis.

"Our father's grandmother was Sarah Mitchell. . . . She was taken a captive at the age of five years and remained with the Indians until she was recovered by her Uncle Richard Berry. My second name is Berry in honor of that man. Sarah Mitchell and Nancy Hanks were first cousins, both orphans, and were reared and educated by the said Uncle Richard Berry. These two girls grew up together, went to school together, and became known as sister-cousins. When Nancy Hanks was married Richard Berry signed the marriage bond, and it along with the return of the minister who performed the marriage ceremony can now be seen sealed in a glass case in the clerk's office at Springfield. At the marriage Sarah Mitchell was the bridesmaid."

Great-great-grandson of Naomi Shipley Mitchell living in Kentucky.

Robert Sloan—Margaret Shipley

"Abraham Lincoln's grandmother was a Shipley and married a Hanks. Her daughter, Nancy Hanks, went to relatives in Kentucky and married a Lincoln. Abraham's grandmother and my grandmother, Margaret Shipley, were sisters. Margaret Shipley Armstrong once sent her son on a visit to her Kentucky relations. . . . Margaret Shipley, my great grandmother, first married Robert Sloan who was killed or died in the Revolutionary War. She married Matthew Armstrong shortly after the Revolution."

Great-granddaughter of Margaret Shipley living in Alabama.

"Robert Mitchell together with Margaret Shipley Sloan Armstrong and another were the administrators of the estate of Robert Sloan, my great-great-grandfather. You see he was grandma Margaret's brother-in-law."

A great-great-granddaughter of Margaret Shipley living in North Carolina.

David McCord—Ann Shipley

"I used to hear my grandmother say that she was a cousin (2nd cousin, I think) to Nancy Hanks or the president, but think it was cousin to Nancy Hanks but don't remember just how the relationship was. My grandmother was Jane Caldwell McCord (married Archibald Simpson) and I find her grandfather was David McCord (b. between 1734 and 1744, d. 1806 or 1816) whose wife was Ann Shipley (about 1740-1828). Their eldest son was born Oct. 5, 1766."

A descendant of Ann Shipley living in Indiana.

"I find that Daniel McCord who settled and bought 1500 acres of land near Boone's Fort, Kentucky, in 1790, came there with his wife and children from North Carolina. His wife's name was Ann Shipley whom he married in Virginia or North Carolina. Their trip to Kentucky was quite eventful, with Indian attacks, a cousin stolen by the Indians, etc."

A descendant of the McCord-Shipley family living in Minnesota.

James Hanks—Lucy Shipley

"The Shipleys were here we know and they kept coming and going until after the Revolution. . . . It is known positively that two of the Hank's family, Richard (Dickey) and James, were here and heads of families in 1790; this is proven by the census. James is supposed by some to have been the father of Nancy."

A great-granddaughter of Margaret Shipley Sloan living in North Carolina.

"Robert Shipley's daughter, Ann, married David McCord; Margaret married Robert Mitchell, Rachel married Richard Berry; and Lucy is said to have married James Hanks, who became the father of Nancy Hanks, the president's mother."

A descendant of Ann Shipley McCord.